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STATE FOR NEA/MAG

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [PINR](#) [LY](#)
SUBJECT: WHAT PASSES FOR POLITICAL FERMENT IN LIBYA

REF: A) TRIPOLI 805; B) TRIPOLI 819

CLASSIFIED BY: Gene A. Cretz, Ambassador, U.S. Embassy Tripoli,
Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (S) Summary: Reform-minded Libyans are "cautiously hopeful" regarding the recent appointment of Saif al-Islam al-Qadhafi as "General Coordinator." While Saif al-Islam is widely seen as a reformer, embassy contacts note that he will face continued resistance from the Libyan old guard. Some observers believe that the appointment was meant to give the regime a "new lease on life" and counter subtle yet growing voices of opposition, particularly with respect to corruption. Given that Saif al-Islam was out of the country when the appointment was made, the meaning of his new position will only start to become clear when he returns to Tripoli. End summary.

¶2. (S) xxxxxxxxxxxx, told Pol/Econ Chief October 22 that he and xxxxxxxxxxxx were "cautiously hopeful" about Saif al-Islam al-Qadhafi's October 6 appointment as "General Coordinator of Social and Popular Committees." He said that Saif was widely known to be a reformer within Libya but had often encountered resistance from the old guard Revolutionary Committee (RevComm) leaders when proposing drastic changes to the government structure, such as the drafting of a constitution or calls to scale back RevComm influence on government administration. He will undoubtedly encounter the same resistance in his new role, according to xxxxxxxxxxxx. "He has a lot of good ideas, but he has been too outspoken about them in the past," xxxxxxxxxxxx commented. Echoing the warning of other embassy contacts, xxxxxxxxxxxx noted that Saif's position would only be effective if empowered with the authority to make decisions and act on them.

¶3. (S) While the exact responsibilities of Saif's new position are unclear, xxxxxxxxxxxx asserted that the move provided the Qadhafi regime a "new lease on life" by introducing a person widely considered to be reform minded - both by local and foreign observers - into the system. xxxxxxxxxxxx argued that the regime was stagnating and that voices of opposition were subtly rising across the country, particularly from the poorer, eastern areas. "The people see what the rest of the world has and know that the country is wealthy, but they do not see any of the wealth. They wonder where it goes." A young Libyan businessman and son of xxxxxxxxxxxx, echoed this refrain, telling us that "Brother Saif will solve these problems of corruption."

¶4. (C) xxxxxxxxxxxx stated that the younger generations are particularly frustrated with their country's slow economic development and lack of employment opportunities, estimating unemployment at 30 percent. xxxxxxxxxxxx believes the regime is

concerned about this frustration exploding into violence. With Saif at the top, xxxxxxxxxxxx reasoned, Muammar al-Qadhafi thinks he will fool people into believing that real change is taking place. Meanwhile, he still has a few more years to control Libya from behind the scenes. xxxxxxxxxxxx fears that the official role will also constrain Saif, who had been relatively free to act and speak out in favor of reform in his nominally "non-governmental" position as Chairman of the Qadhafi Development Foundation.

15. (S) Comment: In true Qadhafi fashion, his latest political move has local observers guessing about what practical effect the announcement will have on the Libyan government and people. Given that Saif al-Islam was out of the country when this appointment was made, the meaning of his new position will likely only start to become clear when he returns to Tripoli. And given the backdrop of political apathy in Libya, ordinary citizens are unlikely to react to the news until they begin to see real change in their daily lives. Many observers here believe that Saif's visible role in the return and welcome given to convicted Lockerbie bomber Abdel Basset al-Megrahi was one of the necessary steps the Qadhafi clan had to take to enable the Leader to elevate Saif to this new position. End comment.

Cretz